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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that explicit explanations of grammar concepts in the first language can be useful in teaching the related structures in a second language. The example used is that of the subjunctive mood, taught first in English and then in Spanish. Specific procedures for presenting the concept in English are outlined, including a set of sentences using the morphological subjunctive, syntactic subjunctive, and a few formulaic expressions. Then the Spanish subjunctive is introduced, using positive, partial, and negative transfer of concepts from English to Spanish. It is concluded that what looks at first to foreign language students like an alien concept can be made less baffling if presented in relation to his native language. In the case of English speakers learning the Spanish subjunctive, this means making students aware that (1) the morphology of the subjunctive still exists to a limited extent in English; (2) there are certain required, predictable constructions that English uses where Spanish uses the morphological subjunctive; and (3) the students already have a thorough, if implicit, grasp of the semantic motivation underlying the subjunctive mood. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Making Grammar Explicit In The Classroom: An Illustration Using The Spanish Subjunctive[1]

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show how the use of explicit grammatical explanation can help students who are learning a foreign language. Specifically, I propose that the Spanish subjunctive can be more easily learned by native English-speaking students if the concept of the subjunctive is first made clear to these students.

An instructor's primary aim in teaching a foreign language is to see to it that students learn that language. From the perspective of that aim, instructors must routinely decide what approach is best for getting students to understand concepts which are both essential and common in the target language, but which students understand poorly in their native language. In the case of the subjunctive and the native English speaker, one choice open to instructors is to make explicit a concept which students, through usage, have mastered implicitly, but only implicitly.

The common pedagogical dictum that "the subjunctive has all but disappeared in English" in fact refers only to the morphology of the subjunctive. It is important to be aware that a language can lose a set of grammatical forms without losing the corresponding concept and the ability to express that concept. What this means for the language teacher is that it is important to understand exactly which grammatical structures have replaced the disappearing morphology.

By presenting what I will refer to as the English subjunctive before they present the Spanish subjunctive, I believe instructors can ease the task of students who are confronted with the Spanish subjunctive for the first time. My approach differs from the traditional textbook approach in that textbooks generally consider the target language only, restricting reference to English grammar to a minimum. I am suggesting that emphasis be placed for a short time on English, so that students might be given the opportunity to

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recognize and understand the concept of the subjunctive in their native language. This will allow them to accept and apply it more readily in Spanish.

I propose that the idea of the subjunctive be made explicit by allowing students to discover, from sentence patterns, the various formal devices that English employs to express the subjunctive. While I am not advocating a return to the grammar-translation method of foreign language teaching in which explicit grammatical explanation is the focus of every lesson, I am suggesting that teachers may occasionally make use of explicit grammar to teach grammatical points that are traditionally difficult because they are alien or unclear to students in their native language. I am aware that this suggestion will probably be viewed as reactionary in relation to certain foreign language teaching theories holding sway at the present time. It can be noted, at any rate, that using explicit grammar to teach a grammatical point such as the subjunctive is completely compatible with the direct method, in which only the target language is used. There is no conflict between making grammar explicit and using the target language to do it.

In order to help students understand the subjunctive, an instructor can suggest to students, by means of sets of sample sentences, that there are several ways in which the subjunctive can be identified in English. I will discuss three of these ways here. The first I will refer to here as *morphological*; this type can be seen in the third-person singular verb form in a sentence such as "I insist that she be prompt." A second type I will refer to here as *syntactic*; this can be exemplified by the sentence "We want her to do it." And the third type consists of *formulaic* expressions such as "Be that as it may."

I will restrict my remarks to the semantic categories of volition, necessity, contrary-to-fact statements, emotion, and opinion, and to formulaic expressions, even though these do not exhaust the notions expressed by the subjunctive in Spanish. They are, however, major categories, and will serve as a foundation which could be extended by analogy. A practical note here: no more than fifteen minutes is needed to present the English subjunctive to a class.

The English Subjunctive

In the classroom, one might begin by introducing a set of English sentences which use the morphological subjunctive, and

asking students what they notice 1) about the third-person singular verb forms in the subordinate clauses, and 2) about the meaning of the main-clause verbs. A few possible sentences are given in (1) to (4) below:

(l) I suggest that he do it now.
(2) She demands that he (you) be here this evening.
(3) We insist that she take it.
(4) They request that she stay home.

The instructor might wish to present these sentences in the form of a transformation drill, so that the contrast between the complex sentences above and the corresponding simple sentences, in which the subordinate-clause verbs are in independent clauses, becomes readily apparent. For example, students are given the simple sentence, "He does it now." Then they are told to put this clause into a sentence which begins, "I suggest that..." and to make any necessary changes. They can therefore discover for themselves the resultant sentence: "I suggest that he do it now."

From the first set of sentences, students notice that the form of the verb in the subordinate clause is consistently different from the form of the same verb in the corresponding independent clause, that the difference lies in the fact that in the subordinate clauses, the infinitive of the verb without "to" is used, instead of the third person singular indicative, and that the verbs in the main clauses of the complex sentences all have a semantic feature in common: they all express volition.[2]

Next consider sentences (5) to (7) below:

(5) If I were you, I'd stay.
(6) I wish he were here.
(7) She acts as if she were a queen bee.

These sentences are also examples of the use of the morphological subjunctive in English, but they are to be treated separately from the previous set of sentences because they express, not volition, but hypothetical or unreal meaning, that is, they are contrary-to-fact statements. But in addition to the semantic

[2] Of course some verbs that express volition, notably the verb "to want," do not fall into this morphological-subjunctive category. These will be treated presently, as part of the syntactic subjunctive.

difference between these sentences and the first set of sentences, (1) to (4), there are some formal differences: Sentences of this type almost always occur with the verb in the past tense, so that the morphology of the subjunctive is apparent only with the verb "to be," since all other English verbs have only one form for all persons in the simple past tense. Thus we say, for example, "If I were you," first person singular contrasting with indicative past "I was," but we say "If I had a dollar," presenting no contrast with "I had a dollar."

With these morphological-subjunctive type sentences illustrated in examples (l) through (7) above, students begin to be aware of the difference between indicative and subjunctive forms, and of some of the semantic uses to which the subjunctive is put, namely to express volition and to make statements which are hypothetical or contrary-to-fact.

Now it is possible to proceed to what I have referred to as the syntactic subjunctive, examples of which are to be found in sentences (8) to (12) below:

(8) She studies. --> I order...*her to study.*
(9) He goes with us. --> I want...*him to go with us.*
(10) You come in.--> I beg ...*you to come in.*
(11) We return. --> They advise...*us to return.*
(12) They help me. --> I need...*(for) them to help me.*

Once again, a transformation drill could be used to make students aware of the structure shared by all of these sentences. So, in accordance with (8) to (12) above, the instructor could provide a simple sentence as given on the left, and ask students to transform each sentence by putting it into the frame given on the right. All of these sentences share the structure Subject NP + Indicative Verb + (for) + Object Noun or Pronoun + "to" Infinitive + (Object of Infinitive). The instructor may or may not wish to discuss the actual grammatical structure of these sentences as I've just presented it. Grammatical terms can be limited to simple terms like "conjugated verb," "infinitive," or "object pronoun," or even eliminated altogether. What counts is that students be able to recognize the similar structure shared by all of the sentences in the group.

Following exposure to this group of sentences as a type of structure, students are again asked to generalize about the meaning of the main-clause verbs in the complex sentences, and they notice that these verbs express volition or necessity. After working with

sentences (1) through (12), students have a pretty good grasp of the notion of mood within their own language, a notion they may previously have been completely unaware of explicitly, but which they had long before grasped implicitly. And along with a knowledge of what modality is, they now have an understanding of how mood is formally expressed in English, including what specific sentence structures are required in order to express the subjunctive mood.

Finally, before making the transition to the Spanish subjunctive, an instructor might also introduce a few formulaic expressions, and ask students what they notice about the verbs in these expressions. Examples are given in (13) to (16):

(13) Be that as it may...
(14) Suffice it to say...
(15) God forgive us!
(16) So be it.

Not only are all of the verbs in these expressions examples of the subjunctive, in the form of the infinitive without "to," they also have in common the fact that they are jussives, hortatory or exclamatory in nature.

The Spanish Subjunctive

Students are now ready to be introduced to the Spanish subjunctive. This can be done by employing positive transfer, negative transfer, and partial transfer. I will begin with positive transfer. One option open to instructors following this approach is to use a transformation drill. Sentence (17) below is similar in meaning to the English sentence given as (1) above:

(17) Lo hace ahora.--Le sugiero que...*lo haga ahora.*

Assuming no problem with the rest of the sentence, the instructor need only step in to help provide the correct form of the subordinate-clause verb, i.e. the subjunctive form, to get students to give the Spanish sentence shown on the right in (17). The class is then invited to repeat the sentence, individually and in chorus. There is no need at this point to discuss the fact that the new verb

form is "haga" and not "hace." More examples are needed first, so that a pattern can become apparent to the students:

(18) Llegan a tiempo. --> Yo les recomiendo que...*lleguen* a tiempo.
(19) Toma la medicina. --> Marta insiste en que...*tome* la medicina.
(20) Sales. --> Piden que...*salgas*.

Following exposure to a set of sentences such as these, students are ready to explain the pattern they discern, i.e. that after main-clause verbs expressing volition, Spanish uses "que" where English would have "that," and Spanish uses a different form of the verb from the expected, indicative, one, just as English does. The differences between the two languages is that, where the form in English is different only after third-person singular subjects (and second-person subjects with the verb "to be"), in Spanish there is a different verb form for each person (except of course that the first- and third-persons singular are the same).

At this point, the instructor should begin to drill paradigms of model verbs in the present subjunctive, preferably based on one of the sentences already introduced.[3]

So much for positive transfer. The instructor next works with partial transfer. Using sentences such as those given in (21) to (25) below, the instructor "begins again":

(21) Estudia. --> Ordeno que...*estudie*.
(22) Va con nosotros. --> Quiero que...*vaya* con nosotros.
(23) Uds. pasan. --> Les ruego a Uds. que ...*pasen*.
(24) Volvemos. --> Nos aconsejan que...*volvamos*.
(25) Me ayudan. --> Necesito que...me *ayuden*.

These sentences are a matter of partial transfer because neither in Spanish nor in English is the indicative used; a systematic alternative is employed in both languages, but the alternative is different for

[3] Concerning contrary-to-fact statements, which, as we've seen, make use of the past subjunctive in English, I recommend avoiding this type of statement in Spanish at this point, even though it is a matter of positive transfer. It is important to avoid confusing students with too many tenses at once; therefore, work with contrary-to-fact statements in Spanish should be delayed until students can control the present subjunctive and are ready to learn the imperfect subjunctive.

each language. The task of the instructor is to show that the Spanish equivalents to English sentences which have the structure shown in (8) to (12) are constructed in Spanish with the morphological subjunctive, that is, with the same structure we saw in sentences (1) to (4) for English and (17) to (20) for Spanish. So, for example, the English sentence "I order her to study," which appears as sentence (8), has the structure NP + Indicative Verb + Object Pronoun + "to" Infinitive. With the help of a transformation drill, students discover that this English construction is rendered in Spanish by the construction NP (implied or expressed) + Indicative Verb + que + NP (implied or expressed) + Subjunctive Verb, i.e. by the morphological subjunctive pattern with which they are already familiar. Again, assuming there are no problems with the rest of the sentence, the instructor need only stand by to help produce the correct form of the subjunctive verb, in order to obtain, for example, the Spanish sentence "Ordeno que estudie," given in (21).[4]

Now for negative transfer, so-called because it involves sentences in which Spanish uses the subjunctive but English uses the indicative. This is traditionally considered a difficult type of lesson, but I believe that if students have been introduced to the subjunctive in the way I have suggested, they will be well-prepared for this stage. I will address expressions of emotion on the one hand, and expressions of doubt and negative opinion on the other.

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[4]Two points can be made here concerning the use of the infinitive in Spanish. The first point rarely causes difficulty for English speakers. I am referring to the construction NP + Indicative Verb + Infinitive, when the subjects of both verbs are the same. The sentence "I want to go," for example is "Quiero ir" in Spanish. I see no problem with the way this point is traditionally taught. The other point has to do with those verbs in Spanish that express volition and which can take either a subordinate-clause construction with the verb in the subjunctive (when the subjects of the two clauses are different), or the construction (NP) + Object Clitic Pronoun + Indicative Verb + Infinitive. For example, Cressey and Borsoi contrast the following sentences:

Mando que salgas. --> Te mando salir.
Dejo que salgas. --> Te dejo salir.
Prohibo que salgas. --> Te prohibo salir.

(Cressey, W. and E. Borsoi, 1972, Tertulia, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts). In principle, these sentences should cause English speakers little problem, since the infinitive construction in Spanish resembles the frequent English construction with the infinitive, as in "I order you to leave." The trick for students is to learn which Spanish verbs allow this variable construction and to avoid overextending its application. While this is a fine point for students who are just being introduced to the Spanish subjunctive, it is nevertheless important and should be taken up as soon as students are comfortable with the morphological subjunctive.

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The instructor might begin by briefly presenting a set of English sentences as follows:

(26) I'm sorry that you are cold.
(27) I'm glad that you are not going away.
(28) I'm afraid that they aren't listening.

Students, when asked, notice that all of the main-clause verbs in this set of sentences express emotion. In a transformation exercise, they will notice that simple sentences undergo no change when put into subordinate clauses in which the main-clause verb expresses emotion. This is shown in (26a) to (28a):

(26a) You are cold. --> I'm sorry that...*you are cold.*
(27a) You're not going away. --> I'm glad that...*you are not going away.*
(28a) They aren't listening. --> I'm afraid that...*they aren't listening*

Following this exercise, the instructor introduces Spanish sentences which express emotion, perhaps by means of a transformation exercise as shown in (29) to (31) below:

(29) Ud. tiene frio. -->Siento que...Ud. *tenga* frio.
(30) No te vas. --> Me alegro de que... no te *vayas.*
(3l) No escuchan. --> Temo que...no *escuchen.*

Because students will by now be familiar with the forms and patterns of the subjunctive in Spanish, they will have little difficulty accepting the fact that expressions of emotion are conveyed by the subjunctive in Spanish, even though the indicative is used with equivalent expressions in English.

The same sort of exercise can be used to contrast the fact that expressions of doubt and negative opinion employ the indicative in English but the subjunctive in Spanish. Consider the following English sentences:

(32) Maria is here.
(33) They are sleeping now.
(34) They are coming back.

When put into a frame in which doubt or negative opinion is expressed, there is no change in the subordinate clause:

(32a) I doubt that...*Maria is here.*
(33a) Do you think (that)...*they are sleeping now?*
(34a) I don't believe (that)...*they are coming back.*

In Spanish we are required to use the subjunctive in similar sentences, and once again students can discover this by means of a transformation exercise. This is shown in (35) to (37) below:

(35) Maria esta aqui. --> Dudo que...Maria *este* aqui.
(36) Duermen. --> Cree Ud. que...*duerman?*
(37) No vuelven. --> No creo que...*vuelvan.*[5]

Conclusion

I have tried to show that by presenting what can be called the English subjunctive, an instructor can make it easier for students to learn the Spanish subjunctive. I first discussed a set of English sentences which contain examples of the morphological subjunctive. Although this is only a vestigial construction in modern English, being aware of it can help students understand why the subjunctive exists in Spanish and how to use it. I also discussed one of the most important syntactic constructions English uses to express the subjunctive mood, exemplified by the sentence "I told her to study."

In addition to the syntactic construction discussed in this paper, important grammatical constructions for expressing the subjunctive mood include the modal auxiliaries, clauses which begin with the jussive "Let" (e.g., "Let her come in"), gerund constructions (as in "I insist on seeing the manager"), and lexical triggers such as "whatever" and "whoever". All of these constructions are not simple possible alternatives to the subjunctive, as textbooks not infrequently state. Each is a predictable structure for expressing the subjunctive mood.

In short, what looks at first like a baffling, alien concept to students of a foreign language can be made less baffling if presented

[5] These sentences should of course be contrasted with expressions of certainty which take the indicative, such as Cre que and the like.

in relation to the students' native language. In the case of English speakers learning the Spanish subjunctive, this means making students aware that the morphology of the subjunctive still exists to a limited extent in English; that there are certain required, predictable constructions that English uses where Spanish uses the morphological subjunctive; and, most importantly, that they, the students, already have a thorough, if implicit, grasp of the semantic motivation underlying the subjunctive mood -- the motivation to express such concepts as volition, necessity, and unreality.

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